BOOK TWO

COMBATING RESISTANCE

Turning Pro

It is one thing to study war
and another to live the warrior’s life.

—Telamon of Arcadia,
mercenary of the fifth century B.C.

PROFESSIONALS AND AMATEURS

Aspiring artists defeated by Resistance share one trait. They all think like amateurs. They have not yet turned pro.

The moment an artist turns pro is as epochal as the birth of his first child. With one stroke, everything changes. I can state absolutely that the term of my life can be divided into two parts: before turning pro, and after.

To be clear: When I say professional, I don't mean doctors and lawyers, those of "the professions." I mean the Professional as an ideal. The professional in contrast to the amateur. Consider the differences.

The amateur plays for fun. The professional plays for keeps.

To the amateur, the game is his avocation. To the pro it's his vocation.

The amateur plays part-time, the professional full-time.

The amateur is a weekend warrior. The professional is there seven days a week.

The word *amateur* comes from the Latin root meaning "to love." The conventional interpretation is that the amateur pursues his calling out of love, while the pro does it for money. Not the way I see it. In my view, the amateur does not love the game enough. If he did, he would not pursue it as a sideline, distinct from his "real" vocation.

The professional loves it so much he dedicates his life to it. He commits full-time.

That's what I mean when I say turning pro.

Resistance hates it when we turn pro.

A PROFESSIONAL

Someone once asked Somerset Maugham if he wrote on a schedule or only when struck by inspiration. “I write only when inspiration strikes,” he replied. “Fortunately it strikes every morning at nine o’clock sharp.”
That’s a pro.
In terms of Resistance, Maugham was saying, “I despise Resistance; I will not let it faze me; I will sit down and do my work.”
Maugham reckoned another, deeper truth: that by performing the mundane physical act of sitting down and starting to work, he set in motion a mysterious but infallible sequence of events that would produce inspiration, as surely as if the goddess had synchronized her watch with his.
He knew if he built it, she would come.

WHAT A WRITER'S DAY FEELS LIKE

I wake up with a gnawing sensation of dissatisfaction. Already I feel fear. Already the loved ones around me are starting to fade. I interact. I'm present. But I'm not.

I'm not thinking about the work. I've already consigned that to the Muse. What I am aware of is Resistance. I feel it in my guts. I afford it the utmost respect, because I know it can defeat me on any given day as easily as the need for a drink can overcome an alcoholic

I go through the chores, the correspondence, the obligations of daily life. Again I'm there but not really. The clock is running in my head; I know I can indulge in daily crap for a little while, but I must cut it off when the bell rings.

I'm keenly aware of the Principle of Priority, which states (a) you must know the difference between what is urgent and what is important, and (b) you must do what's important first.

What's important is the work. That's the game I have to suit up for. That's the field on which I have to leave everything I've got.

Do I really believe that my work is crucial to the planet's survival? Of course not. But it's as important to me as catching that mouse is to the hawk circling outside my window. He's hungry. He needs a kill. So do I.

I'm done with my chores now. It's time. I say my prayer and head out on the hunt.

The sun isn't up yet; it's cold; the fields are sopping. Brambles scratch my ankles, branches snap back in my face. The hill is a sonofabitch but what can you do? Set one foot in front of another and keep climbing.

An hour passes. I'm warmer now, the pace has got my blood going. The years have taught me one skill: how to be miserable. I know how to shut up and keep humping. This is a great asset because it's human, the proper role for a mortal. It does not offend the gods, but elicits their intercession. My bitching self is receding now. The instincts are taking over. Another hour passes. I turn the corner of a thicket and there he is: the nice fat hare I knew would show up if I just kept plugging.

Home from the hill, I thank the immortals and offer up their portion of the kill. They brought it to me; they deserve their share. I am grateful.

I joke with my kids beside the fire. They're happy; the old man has brought home the bacon. The old lady's happy; she's cooking it up. I'm happy; I've

earned my keep on the planet, at least for this day.

Resistance is not a factor now. I don’t think of the hunt and I don’t think of the office. The tension drains from my neck and back. What I feel and say and do this night will not be coming from any disowned or unresolved part of me, any part corrupted by Resistance.

I go to sleep content, but my final thought is of Resistance. I will wake up with it tomorrow. Already I am steeling myself.

HOW TO BE MISERABLE

In my younger days dodging the draft, I somehow wound up in the Marine Corps. There’s a myth that Marine training turns baby-faced recruits into bloodthirsty killers. Trust me, the Marine Corps is not that efficient. What it does teach, however, is a lot more useful.

The Marine Corps teaches you how to be miserable.

This is invaluable for an artist.

Marines love to be miserable. Marines derive a perverse satisfaction from having colder chow, crappier equipment, and higher casualty rates than any outfit of dogfaces, swab jockeys or flyboys, all of whom they despise.

Why? Because these candy-asses don’t know how to be miserable.

The artist committing himself to his calling has volunteered for hell, whether he knows it or not. He will be dining for the duration on a diet of isolation, rejection, self-doubt, despair, ridicule, contempt, and humiliation.

The artist must be like that Marine. He has to know how to be miserable. He has to love being miserable. He has to take pride in being more miserable than any soldier or swabbie or jet jockey. Because this is war, baby. And war is hell.

WE’RE ALL PROS ALREADY

All of us are pros in one area: our jobs.
We get a paycheck. We work for money. We are professionals.
Now: Are there principles we can take from what we’re already successfully doing in our workaday lives and apply to our artistic aspirations? What exactly are the qualities that define us as professionals?
1) *We show up every day.* We might do it only because we have to, to keep from getting fired. But we do it. We show up every day.
2) *We show up no matter what.* In sickness and in health, come hell or high water, we stagger in to the factory. We might do it only so as not to let down our co-workers, or for other, less noble reasons. But we do it. We show up no matter what.
3) *We stay on the job all day.* Our minds may wander, but our bodies remain at the wheel. We pick up the phone when it rings, we assist the customer when he seeks our help. We don’t go home till the whistle blows.
4) *We are committed over the long haul.* Next year we may go to another job, another company, another country. But we’ll still be working. Until we hit the lottery, we are part of the labor force.
5) *The stakes for us are high and real.* This is about survival, feeding our families, educating our children. It’s about eating.
6) *We accept remuneration for our labor.* We’re not here for fun. We work for money.
7) *We do not overidentify with our jobs.* We may take pride in our work, we may stay late and come in on weekends, but we recognize that we are not our job descriptions. The amateur, on the other hand, overidentifies with his avocation, his artistic aspiration. He defines himself by it. He is a musician, a painter, a playwright. Resistance loves this. Resistance knows that the amateur composer will never write his symphony because he is overly invested in its success and overterrified of its failure. The amateur takes it so seriously it paralyzes him.
8) *We master the technique of our jobs.*
9) *We have a sense of humor about our jobs.*
10) *We receive praise or blame in the real world.*
Now consider the amateur: the aspiring painter, the wannabe playwright. How does he pursue his calling?

One, he doesn't show up every day. Two, he doesn't show up no matter what. Three, he doesn't stay on the job all day. He is not committed over the long haul; the stakes for him are illusory and fake. He does not get money. And he overidentifies with his art. He does not have a sense of humor about failure. You don't hear him bitching, "This fucking trilogy is killing me!" Instead, he doesn't write his trilogy at all.

The amateur has not mastered the technique of his art. Nor does he expose himself to judgment in the real world. If we show our poem to our friend and our friend says, "It's wonderful, I love it," that's not real-world feedback, that's our friend being nice to us. Nothing is as empowering as real-world validation, even if it's for failure.

The first professional writing job I ever had, after seventeen years of trying, was on a movie called *King Kong Lives*. I and my partner-at-the-time, Ron Shusett (a brilliant writer and producer who also did *Alien* and *Total Recall*) hammered out the screenplay for Dino DeLaurentiis. We loved it; we were sure we had a hit. Even after we'd seen the finished film, we were certain it was a blockbuster. We invited everyone we knew to the premiere, even rented out the joint next door for a post-triumph blowout. Get there early, we warned our friends, the place'll be mobbed.

Nobody showed. There was only one guy in line beside our guests and he was muttering something about spare change. In the theater, our friends endured the movie in mute stupefaction. When the lights came up, they fled like cockroaches into the night.

Next day came the review in *Variety*: ". . . Ronald Shusett and Steven Pressfield; we hope these are not their real names, for their parents' sake." When the first week's grosses came in, the flick barely registered. Still I clung to hope. Maybe it's only tanking in urban areas, maybe it's playing better in the burbs. I motored to an Edge City multiplex. A youth manned the popcorn booth. "How's *King Kong Lives?"* I asked. He flashed thumbs-down. "Miss it, man. It sucks."

I was crushed. Here I was, forty-two years old, divorced, childless, having given up all normal human pursuits to chase the dream of being a writer; now I've finally got my name on a big-time Hollywood production starring Linda Hamilton, and what happens? I'm a loser, a phony; my life is worthless, and so am I.

My friend Tony Keppelman snapped me out of it by asking if I was gonna quit. Hell, no! "Then be happy. You're where you wanted to be, aren't you?

So you’re taking a few blows. That’s the price for being in the arena and not on the sidelines. Stop complaining and be grateful.”
That was when I realized I had become a pro. I had not yet had a success. But I had had a real failure.

FOR LOVE OF THE GAME

To clarify a point about professionalism: The professional, though he accepts money, does his work out of love. He has to love it. Otherwise he wouldn’t devote his life to it of his own free will.

The professional has learned, however, that too much love can be a bad thing. Too much love can make him choke. The seeming detachment of the professional, the cold-blooded character to his demeanor, is a compensating device to keep him from loving the game so much that he freezes in action. Playing for money, or adopting the attitude of one who plays for money, lowers the fever.

Remember what we said about fear, love, and Resistance. The more you love your art/calling/enterprise, the more important its accomplishment is to the evolution of your soul, the more you will fear it and the more Resistance you will experience facing it. The payoff of playing-the-game-for-money is not the money (which you may never see anyway, even after you turn pro). The payoff is that playing the game for money produces the proper professional attitude. It inculcates the lunch-pail mentality, the hard-core, hard-head, hard-hat state of mind that shows up for work despite rain or snow or dark of night and slugs it out day after day.

The writer is an infantryman. He knows that progress is measured in yards of dirt extracted from the enemy one day, one hour, one minute at a time and paid for in blood. The artist wears combat boots. He looks in the mirror and sees GI Joe. Remember, the Muse favors working stiffs. She hates prima donnas. To the gods the supreme sin is not rape or murder, but pride. To think of yourself as a mercenary, a gun for hire, implants the proper humility. It purges pride and preciousness.

Resistance loves pride and preciousness. Resistance says, “Show me a writer who’s too good to take Job X or Assignment Y and I’ll show you a guy I can crack like a walnut.”

Technically, the professional takes money. Technically, the pro plays for pay. But in the end, he does it for love.

Now let’s consider: What are the aspects of the Professional?

A PROFESSIONAL IS PATIENT

Resistance outwits the amateur with the oldest trick in the book: It uses his own enthusiasm against him. Resistance gets us to plunge into a project with an overambitious and unrealistic timetable for its completion. It knows we can’t sustain that level of intensity. We will hit the wall. We will crash.
The professional, on the other hand, understands delayed gratification. He is the ant, not the grasshopper; the tortoise, not the hare. Have you heard the legend of Sylvester Stallone staying up three nights straight to churn out the screenplay for *Rocky?* I don’t know, it may even be true. But it’s the most pernicious species of myth to set before the awakening writer, because it seduces him into believing he can pull off the big score without pain and without persistence.
The professional arms himself with patience, not only to give the stars time to align in his career, but to keep himself from flaming out in each individual work. He knows that any job, whether it’s a novel or a kitchen remodel, takes twice as long as he thinks and costs twice as much. He accepts that. He recognizes it as reality.
The professional steels himself at the start of a project, reminding himself it is the Iditarod, not the sixty-yard dash. He conserves his energy. He prepares his mind for the long haul. He sustains himself with the knowledge that if he can just keep those huskies mushing, sooner or later the sled will pull in to Nome.

A PROFESSIONAL SEEKS ORDER

When I lived in the back of my Chevy van, I had to dig my typewriter out from beneath layers of tire tools, dirty laundry, and moldering paperbacks. My truck was a nest, a hive, a hellhole on wheels whose sleeping surface I had to clear each night just to carve out a foxhole to snooze in.

The professional cannot live like that. He is on a mission. He will not tolerate disorder. He eliminates chaos from his world in order to banish it from his mind. He wants the carpet vacuumed and the threshold swept, so the Muse may enter and not soil her gown.

A PROFESSIONAL DEMYSTIFIES

A pro views her work as craft, not art. Not because she believes art is devoid of a mystical dimension. On the contrary. She understands that all creative endeavor is holy, but she doesn't dwell on it. She knows if she thinks about that too much, it will paralyze her. So she concentrates on technique. The professional masters how, and leaves what and why to the gods. Like Somerset Maugham she doesn't wait for inspiration, she acts in the anticipation of its apparition. The professional is acutely aware of the intangibles that go into inspiration. Out of respect for them, she lets them work. She grants them their sphere while she concentrates on hers.

The sign of the amateur is overglorification of and preoccupation with the mystery.

The professional shuts up. She doesn't talk about it. She does her work.

A PROFESSIONAL ACTS IN THE

FACE OF FEAR

The amateur believes he must first overcome his fear; then he can do his work. The professional knows that fear can never be overcome. He knows there is no such thing as a fearless warrior or a dread-free artist.
What Henry Fonda does, after puking into the toilet in his dressing room, is to clean up and march out onstage. He’s still terrified but he forces himself forward in spite of his terror. He knows that once he gets out into the action, his fear will recede and he’ll be okay.

A PROFESSIONAL

ACCEPTS NO EXCUSES

The amateur, underestimating Resistance’s cunning, permits the flu to keep him from his chapters; he believes the serpent’s voice in his head that says mailing off that manuscript is more important than doing the day’s work.
The professional has learned better. He respects Resistance. He knows if he caves in today, no matter how plausible the pretext, he’ll be twice as likely to cave in tomorrow.
The professional knows that Resistance is like a telemarketer; if you so much as say hello, you’re finished. The pro doesn’t even pick up the phone. He stays at work.

A PROFESSIONAL

PLAYS IT AS IT LAYS

My friend the Hawk and I were playing the first hole at Prestwick in Scotland; the wind was howling out of the left. I started an eight-iron thirty yards to windward, but the gale caught it; I watched in dismay as the ball sailed hard right, hit the green going sideways, and bounded off into the cabbage. “Sonofabitch!” I turned to our caddie. “Did you see the wind take that shot!?”

He gave that look that only Scottish caddies can give. “Well, ye’ve got t’ play th’ wind now, don’t ye?”

The professional conducts his business in the real world. Adversity, injustice, bad hops and rotten calls, even good breaks and lucky bounces all comprise the ground over which the campaign must be waged. The field is level, the professional understands, only in heaven.

A PROFESSIONAL IS PREPARED

I’m not talking about craft; that goes without saying. The professional is prepared at a deeper level. He is prepared, each day, to confront his own self-sabotage.

The professional understands that Resistance is fertile and ingenious. It will throw stuff at him that he’s never seen before.

The professional prepares mentally to absorb blows and to deliver them. His aim is to take what the day gives him. He is prepared to be prudent and prepared to be reckless, to take a beating when he has to, and to go for the throat when he can. He understands that the field alters every day. His goal is not victory (success will come by itself when it wants to) but to handle himself, his insides, as sturdily and steadily as he can.

A PROFESSIONAL

DOES NOT SHOW OFF

A professional’s work has style; it is distinctively his own. But he doesn’t let his signature grandstand for him. His style serves the material. He does not impose it as a means of drawing attention to himself.
This doesn’t mean that the professional doesn’t throw down a 360 tomahawk jam from time to time, just to let the boys know he’s still in business.

A PROFESSIONAL

DEDICATES HIMSELF

TO MASTERING TECHNIQUE

The professional respects his craft. He does not consider himself superior to it. He recognizes the contributions of those who have gone before him. He apprentices himself to them.

The professional dedicates himself to mastering technique not because he believes technique is a substitute for inspiration but because he wants to be in possession of the full arsenal of skills when inspiration does come. The professional is sly. He knows that by toiling beside the front door of technique, he leaves room for genius to enter by the back.

A PROFESSIONAL

DOES NOT HESITATE

TO ASK FOR HELP

Tiger Woods is the greatest golfer in the world. Yet he has a teacher; he works with Butch Harmon. And Tiger doesn’t endure this instruction or suffer through it—he revels in it. It’s his keenest professional joy to get out there on the practice tee with Butch, to learn more about the game he loves. Tiger Woods is the consummate professional. It would never occur to him, as it would to an amateur, that he knows everything, or can figure everything out on his own. On the contrary, he seeks out the most knowledgeable teacher and listens with both ears. The student of the game knows that the levels of revelation that can unfold in golf, as in any art, are inexhaustible.

A PROFESSIONAL

DISTANCES HERSELF

FROM HER INSTRUMENT

The pro stands at one remove from her instrument— meaning her person, her body, her voice, her talent; the physical, mental, emotional, and psychological being she uses in her work. She does not identify with this instrument. It is simply what God gave her, what she has to work with. She assesses it coolly, impersonally, objectively.

The professional identifies with her consciousness and her will, not with the matter that her consciousness and will manipulate to serve her art. Does Madonna walk around the house in cone bras and come-fuck-me bustiers? She’s too busy planning D-Day. Madonna does not identify with “Madonna.” Madonna employs “Madonna.”

A PROFESSIONAL

DOES NOT TAKE FAILURE

(OR SUCCESS) PERSONALLY

When people say an artist has a thick skin, what they mean is not that the person is dense or numb, but that he has seated his professional consciousness in a place other than his personal ego. It takes tremendous strength of character to do this, because our deepest instincts run counter to it. Evolution has programmed us to feel rejection in our guts. This is how the tribe enforced obedience, by wielding the threat of expulsion. Fear of rejection isn't just psychological; it's biological. It's in our cells.

Resistance knows this and uses it against us. It uses fear of rejection to paralyze us and prevent us, if not from doing our work, then from exposing it to public evaluation. I had a dear friend who had labored for years on an excellent and deeply personal novel. It was done. He had it in its mailing box. But he couldn't make himself send it off. Fear of rejection unmanned him.

The professional cannot take rejection personally because to do so reinforces Resistance. Editors are not the enemy; critics are not the enemy. Resistance is the enemy. The battle is inside our own heads. We cannot let external criticism, even if it's true, fortify our internal foe. That foe is strong enough already.

A professional schools herself to stand apart from her performance, even as she gives herself to it heart and soul. *The Bhagavad-Gita* tells us we have a right only to our labor, not to the fruits of our labor. All the warrior can give is his life; all the athlete can do is leave everything on the field.

The professional loves her work. She is invested in it wholeheartedly. But she does not forget that the work is not her. Her artistic self contains many works and many performances. Already the next is percolating inside her. The next will be better, and the one after that better still.

The professional self-validates. She is tough-minded. In the face of indifference or adulation, she assesses her stuff coldly and objectively.

Where it fell short, she'll improve it. Where it triumphed, she'll make it better still. She'll work harder. She'll be back tomorrow.

The professional gives an ear to criticism, seeking to learn and grow. But she never forgets that Resistance is using criticism against her on a far more diabolical level. Resistance enlists criticism to reinforce the fifth column of fear already at work inside the artist's head, seeking to break her will and crack her dedication. The professional does not fall for this. Her resolution, before all others, remains: No matter what, I will never let Resistance beat me.

A PROFESSIONAL

ENDURES ADVERSITY

I had been in Tinseltown five years, had finished nine screenplays on spec, none of which had sold. Finally I got a meeting with a big producer. He kept taking phone calls, even as I pitched my stuff. He had one of those headset things, so he didn't even have to pick up a receiver; the calls came in and he took them. Finally one came that was personal. "Would you mind?" he asked, indicating the door. "I need some privacy on this one." I exited. The door closed behind me. Ten minutes passed. I was standing out by the secretaries. Twenty more minutes passed. Finally the producer's door opened; he came out pulling on his jacket. "Oh, I'm so sorry!"

He had forgotten all about me.

I'm human. This hurt. I wasn't a kid either; I was in my forties, with a rap sheet of failure as long as your arm.

The professional cannot let himself take humiliation personally. Humiliation, like rejection and criticism, is the external reflection of internal Resistance.

The professional endures adversity. He lets the birdshit splash down on his slicker, remembering that it comes clean with a heavy-duty hosing. He himself, his creative center, cannot be buried, even beneath a mountain of guano. His core is bulletproof. Nothing can touch it unless he lets it.

I saw a fat happy old guy once in his Cadillac on the freeway. He had the A/C going, Pointer Sisters on the CD, puffing on a stogie. His license plate:

DUES PD

The professional keeps his eye on the doughnut and not on the hole. He reminds himself it's better to be in the arena, getting stomped by the bull, than to be up in the stands or out in the parking lot.

A PROFESSIONAL SELF-VALIDATES

An amateur lets the negative opinion of others unman him. He takes external criticism to heart, allowing it to trump his own belief in himself and his work. Resistance loves this.

Can you stand another Tiger Woods story? With four holes to go on the final day of the 2001 Masters (which Tiger went on to win, completing the all-four-majors-at-one-time Slam), some chucklehead in the gallery snapped a camera shutter at the top of Tiger's backswing. Incredibly, Tiger was able to pull up in mid-swing and back off the shot. But that wasn't the amazing part. After looking daggers at the malefactor, Tiger recomposed himself, stepped back to the ball, and striped it 310 down the middle.

That's a professional. It is tough-mindedness at a level most of us can't comprehend, let alone emulate. But let's look more closely at what Tiger did, or rather what he didn't do.

First, he didn't react reflexively. He didn't allow an act that by all rights should have provoked an automatic response of rage to actually produce that rage. He controlled his reaction. He governed his emotion.

Second, he didn't take it personally. He could have perceived this shutterbug's act as a deliberate blow aimed at him individually, with the intention of throwing him off his shot. He could have reacted with outrage or indignation or cast himself as a victim. He didn't.

Third, he didn't take it as a sign of heaven's malevolence. He could have experienced this bolt as the malice of the golfing gods, like a bad hop in baseball or a linesman's miscall in tennis. He could have groaned or sulked or surrendered mentally to this injustice, this interference, and used it as an excuse to fail. He didn't.

What he did do was maintain his sovereignty over the moment. He understood that, no matter what blow had befallen him from an outside agency, he himself still had his job to do, the shot he needed to hit right here, right now. And he knew that it remained within his power to produce that shot. Nothing stood in his way except whatever emotional upset he himself chose to hold on to. Tiger's mother, Kultida, is a Buddhist. Perhaps from her he had learned compassion, to let go of fury at the heedlessness of an overzealous shutter-clicker. In any event Tiger Woods, the ultimate

professional, vented his anger quickly with a look, then recomposed himself and returned to the task at hand.

The professional cannot allow the actions of others to define his reality. Tomorrow morning the critic will be gone, but the writer will still be there facing the blank page. Nothing matters but that he keep working. Short of a family crisis or the outbreak of World War III, the professional shows up, ready to serve the gods.

Remember, Resistance wants us to cede sovereignty to others. It wants us to stake our self-worth, our identity, our reason-for-being, on the response of others to our work. Resistance knows we can't take this. No one can.

The professional blows critics off. He doesn't even hear them. Critics, he reminds himself, are the unwitting mouthpieces of Resistance and as such can be truly cunning and pernicious. They can articulate in their reviews the same toxic venom that Resistance itself concocts inside our heads. That is their real evil. Not that we believe them, but that we believe the Resistance in our own minds, for which critics serve as unconscious spokespersons.

The professional learns to recognize envy-driven criticism and to take it for what it is: the supreme compliment. The critic hates most that which he would have done himself if he had had the guts.

A PROFESSIONAL RECOGNIZES HER LIMITATIONS

She gets an agent, she gets a lawyer, she gets an accountant. She knows she can only be a professional at one thing. She brings in other pros and treats them with respect.

A PROFESSIONAL

REINVENTS HIMSELF

Goldie Hawn once observed that there are only three ages for an actress in Hollywood: “Babe, D.A., and Driving Miss Daisy.” She was making a different point, but the truth remains: As artists we serve the Muse, and the Muse may have more than one job for us over our lifetime.

The professional does not permit himself to become hidebound within one incarnation, however comfortable or successful. Like a transmigrating soul, he shucks his outworn body and dons a new one. He continues his journey.

A PROFESSIONAL IS RECOGNIZED BY OTHER PROFESSIONALS

The professional senses who has served his time and who hasn’t. Like Alan Ladd and Jack Palance circling each other in *Shane*, a gun recognizes another gun.

YOU, INC.

When I first moved to Los Angeles and made the acquaintance of working screenwriters, I learned that many had their own corporations. They provided their writing services not as themselves but as “loan-outs” from their one-man businesses. Their writing contracts were f/s/o —“for services of ”— themselves. I had never seen this before. I thought it was pretty cool. For a writer to incorporate himself has certain tax and financial advantages. But what I love about it is the metaphor. I like the idea of being Myself, Inc. That way I can wear two hats. I can hire myself and fire myself. I can even, as Robin Williams once remarked of writer-producers, blow smoke up my own ass.

Making yourself a corporation (or just thinking of yourself in that way) reinforces the idea of professionalism because it separates the artist-doing-the-work from the will-and-consciousness-running-the-show. No matter how much abuse is heaped on the head of the former, the latter takes it in stride and keeps on trucking. Conversely with success: You-the-writer may get a swelled head, but you-the-boss remember how to take yourself down a peg.

Have you ever worked in an office? Then you know about Monday morning status meetings. The group assembles in the conference room and the boss goes over what assignments each team member is responsible for in the coming week. When the meeting breaks up, an assistant prepares a work sheet and distributes it. When this hits your desk an hour later, you know exactly what you have to do that week.

I have one of those meetings with myself every Monday. I sit down and go over my assignments. Then I type it up and distribute it to myself.

I have corporate stationery and corporate business cards and a corporate checkbook. I write off corporate expenses and pay corporate taxes. I have different credit cards for myself and my corporation.

If we think of ourselves as a corporation, it gives us a healthy distance on ourselves. We’re less subjective. We don’t take blows as personally. We’re more cold-blooded; we can price our wares more realistically. Sometimes, as Joe Blow himself, I’m too mild-mannered to go out and sell. But as Joe Blow, Inc., I can pimp the hell out of myself. I’m not me anymore. I’m Me, Inc.

I’m a pro.

A CRITTER THAT KEEPS COMING

Why does Resistance yield to our turning pro? Because Resistance is a bully. Resistance has no strength of its own; its power derives entirely from our fear of it. A bully will back down before the runtiest twerp who stands his ground.

The essence of professionalism is the focus upon the work and its demands, while we are doing it, to the exclusion of all else. The ancient Spartans schooled themselves to regard the enemy, any enemy, as nameless and faceless. In other words, they believed that if they did their work, no force on earth could stand against them. In *The Searchers*, John Wayne and Jeffrey Hunter pursue the war chief, Scar, who has kidnapped their young kinswoman, played by Natalie Wood. Winter stops them, but Wayne's character, Ethan Edwards, does not slacken his resolve. He'll return to the trail in spring, he declares, and, sooner or later, the fugitive's vigilance will slacken.

ETHAN

Seems he never learns there's such a thing as a critter that might just keep comin' on. So we'll find 'em in the end, I promise you that. Just as sure as the turning of the earth.

The pro keeps coming on. He beats Resistance at its own game by being even more resolute and even more implacable than it is.

NO MYSTERY

There’s no mystery to turning pro. It’s a decision brought about by an act of will. We make up our minds to view ourselves as pros and we do it. Simple as that.